

Rationale Memo (revised)
ENG 101: The Ethics of Immortality
Fall 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

Through a thoughtful combination of multimodal student texts and readings which showcase a variety of rhetorical moves, this writing-intensive course on the ethics of immortality should prepare students to become more proficient writers and communicators in any discipline they choose to later enter. More importantly, students will begin to see themselves as authors in their own right, integral parts of a larger critical conversation.

I wanted to frame the larger conversation of immortality in science, which many students understand as “indisputable.” So we start and end the course with scientific conceptions of immortality. In between, we engage spiritual and magical concepts, psychological and supernatural ideas of immortality before thinking about genetics and artificial intelligence. The point in covering these different concepts is to have students understanding the many debates surrounding the larger topic and the idea of “living forever.” As students march forward, they will build an arsenal of texts while inventing and defending their own definitions which they will use in their own reflections, revisions, debates, and writing.

The units are organized by both rhetorical technique and by immortality concept. After beginning the course with some vital community building, each week, we will be using these concepts of immortality as models and to explore how such rhetorical techniques (like dialogue, thesis, authority, etc.) work across various situations and genres of writing. Also, we will always discuss, write, and think critically about how these rhetorical techniques help us to understand the debates and contexts of immortality more clearly. There will also be chances for students to submit their own texts and artifacts (encompassing various cultures and languages) dealing with immortality, since this syllabus cannot cover absolutely everything we all want to say.

I have divided the student writing assignments into “Brief” and “Extended” writings in order to deconstruct the binary of major and minor assessments. The Brief Writings are mainly texts that students will produce repeatedly over the course of the semester, like Think Pieces and Reflections. I have also included Peer Reviews, Annotated Bibliography, and the Pitch assignments to this category as they are meant, to a degree, to be scaffolds for the Extended Writing activities. Those, on the other hand, consist of student texts that are produced only once, and over a longer period of time with revision and presentation. Some of these, like the Jigsaw Project and the High Stakes Investigation event contain several parts and occur over several class sessions.

The purpose of the Think Pieces and the Reflections is to have students think critically about the readings and texts we present in class and for homework (OYO). These are short writing assignments and occur weekly, or daily. Think Pieces are in-class assignments, and cannot be made up if missed. They are prompt-based writing reflections, derived from the units. Often I will have students compose these via Twitter and not in traditional written form. I would

like these to be eventually typed so that they can be handed in at the end of the semester in a course portfolio; however, during class, students may handwrite them. The Reflections are to be posted to the student's blog and can be alphabetic, visual, or aural. I will be responsible for making sure each student had completed the assignment by the beginning of each week. Often the Think Piece prompt will be based on these Reflections.

The Annotated Bibliography, which is a very short one, is a great way of getting students to think about what pieces of evidence are valuable, or not, to a given research question and why. It's also a good way to get them to summarize in a concise fashion. This text will consist of 3-5 annotations and correct MLA citation, and will anticipate the Literature Review and Analytical Paper (Extended Writing) in later week, which both build on those skills. The Peer Reviews are a part of the large, collaborative Jigsaw Project and will be semi-blind. Students will have a chance to evaluate the work of their classmates, but since the Jigsaw is so late in the semester, there will be other opportunities for students to present and evaluate the work of their peers. One of these comes in the form of the Pitch activity. Here, students will be able to create a pitch for a TV show, film, or book, or a conference proposal, based on the ideas we discuss in class, and then present it to a partner in a speed dating scenario. Then the partners will switch roles between agent and writer before having a chance for feedback and revision.

The portfolio is an essential part of the course. Students will compile a portfolio of written work, including two analysis papers, revisions, and peer reviews, as a part of the major Jigsaw Project as for the High Stakes Investigation midterm. As they evaluate various definitions and the rhetoric of immortality, students will also compose a photo essay (with 10-15 entries) over the course of the term which will culminate in a digital portfolio much like a gallery and will be published publicly to Instagram or Tumblr for a public audience. For this continuing assignment, students will generate their own criteria as a class for individual posts, and then will generate a set of criteria for the final product. Finally, there will be a portfolio of Think Pieces and Reflections showcased digitally on the student's blog (with the option for privacy).

I have chosen model texts across all modes which imagine immortality in both clear and in challenging ways. The texts are not just alphabetic, but also visual and aural and showcase a variety of rhetorical moves. We will have a chance to watch films, listen to music, view artwork and other performances. These are meant to be exciting and accessible, and recognizable, for students. In those familiar texts, the hope is that the students will be able to think critically and engage in an unfamiliar perspective on the notion of immortality. They will also have chances to debate these texts and their interpretations in a safe, supportive environment. It is my hope that all of these serve to help students reach the learning outcomes, and more importantly, develop into stronger writers and communicators.

Justin Shaw